

Cp970.73
B882

The Battle of Newbern, N. C., March 14, 1862
by Lieut. F. W. Browne

The Library
of the
University of North Carolina



Collection of North Caroliniana

Endowed by
John Sprunt Hill
of the Class of 1889

Cp970.73
B882

J. A. R. Wal Papers
Fred C. Jones Post
Cincinnati, 1891

Op 970.73
B882

THE BATTLE OF NEWBERN, N. C., MARCH 14, 1862.

By LIEUT. F. W. BROWNE.

THE morning of March 13, 1862, dawning upon a sky heavily overclouded with fog and a drizzling rain, found the fleet of the Burnside expedition to North Carolina lying at anchor at the mouth of the Neuse River, and, as soon as it was light enough to see, the entire fleet started up the river, the naval division, of course, in the advance. About ten o'clock in the morning the navy found the enemy's position, on the right bank of the river, to be so heavily fortified that it was unable to make any further headway, and so the land forces were at once disembarked. This was done by the light-draft steamers running in shore until they grounded, when the men on board jumped overboard and floundered ashore. From the larger craft the men were sent ashore in whale-boats, but before any went ashore, some of the naval vessels shelled the woods at the point of disembarking. The force landing consisted of the three brigades of Foster, Reno and Parke, all under Burnside, and so hurriedly was the landing made, and so few were the facilities for getting ashore, that the entire force was totally without wagons, ambulances, or anything on wheels, until after the battle of the succeeding day, except two, or perhaps three, small boat howitzers on wrought-iron carriages, which were dragged by hand,

and every round of ammunition for which was carried by hand over the most execrable of roads, for the battle of the next day; and the same of all hospital and food supplies.

The force, being on shore, at once took up its line of march for Newbern, and about 2 P.M. came upon the enemy's first line of defense—abandoned. Some of the men, remarking its strength, suggested that the enemy must have a strong place to fall back upon, a surmise which was abundantly verified the next day. Marching until about 9 P.M., the regiments simply filed to the right and left into the swamp, and bivouacked for the night as best they could in the rain. Early the next morning the men were astir, and soon the order came to advance, and the regiment to which the writer belonged had gone about a quarter of a mile when I saw, at the side of the road, Generals Foster and Burnside, with a few of their staffs, and a young man in citizen's clothes, slender and dark-complexioned, evidently a native, who was being subjected to a rather stern and severe cross-examination. I heard Foster say to him: "You say that the enemy's line extends from the railroad to the river?" and he, pale as the white horse he sat on, answered faintly in the affirmative. Whereupon General Burnside said: "You have betrayed us." By this time I had passed out of hearing, but what I had heard was calculated to make a raw recruit open his eyes.

Immediately the head of the regiment was turned to the left from the main road into a small cart-path, and the regiment had just about drawn its entire

length into said cart-path, and off of the main road, when we received a volley from the right and front, of artillery and musketry, at close range and of deadly character. It killed our lieutenant-colonel, Merritt; carried away my captain's leg, and killed and wounded a good many of the men; and the battle of Newbern had opened. The command was given on the right by file into line, and the men began firing as soon as they came into line. We continued firing until our ammunition was exhausted, when we were ordered to fix bayonets, fall back ten paces and lie down, and the attempt was made to bring the Eleventh Connecticut Regiment by the left flank in front of us, which was an abject failure, as the regiment went all to pieces under the enemy's fire. This regiment afterwards, on other fields, more especially at the stone bridge at Antietam, won glory and honor, but I venture to say the survivors do not "point with pride" to the battle of Newbern.

About this time the Twenty-first Massachusetts charged the enemy's line at the point where the railroad crossed the line of the enemy's works, and succeeded in getting in, but were promptly thrown out again by a countercharge of the enemy. Soon after, the order was given to charge at the point where the pike crossed the line of the enemy's works, and it was made by the regiments at hand, led by the Twenty-fifth Massachusetts. This got in and stayed there, and then was revealed the point of weakness in the enemy's engineering, for although their lines were very strong to the front, they were all open to the rear, with no inclosed works or traverses; and

so, when we were once inside, we took everything in reverse, and swept the enemy from their works to the right and left at once. Some of the water batteries, which had kept back the navy, were iron-clad toward the river, but had no defense to the rear, and we soon silenced their heavy guns. The battle on our part of the field was soon closed, but for twenty minutes at least the long roll of Reno's musketry arose from the swamps beyond the railroad, where the enemy were making stubborn resistance to his advance, in ignorance of what had befallen their comrades near the river. We had captured an entire battery of twelve-pounder brass Napoleons at the pike where we charged, and also, of course, all the heavy guns in the river batteries.

✓ The enemy having disappeared, we took up our line of march for Newbern, arriving about an hour later on the south bank of the Trent River, opposite the town, which at that time was a sight to behold, the enemy, in his retreat, having fired the railroad bridge, steamboats, mills, warehouses full of cotton, rosin and turpentine, the dockyards, etc.; and the flames and smoke were going straight up to the heavens. We found a small boat, and about ten of us got in and rowed over and landed at the wharf at the foot of Craven street, and all that evening and the succeeding night, and part of the next day, were searching around the town for our regiment; indeed, we did not succeed in finding it until it was pointed out to us by the provost marshal.

. The next morning after the fight, a small squad of Confederate cavalry, bearing a flag of truce, came

slowly down the pike to the town, turned into the main street, and passed on down until it finally drew up of its own accord before the headquarters of General Burnside, no one having even taken the trouble to ask what it wanted or where it was going. While General Burnside was considering the message it brought, and having an answer prepared, there was a good deal of lively talk between the crowd of our boys, who gathered around, and the Johnnies. The Rebel lieutenant in command was a smart, snappy little fellow, and did not seem much impressed with our way of doing guard and out-post duty, for, before leaving, he confided to us his purpose to take ten men the next night and come in and capture the whole outfit.

UNIVERSITY OF N.C. AT CHAPEL HILL



00032726024

FOR USE ONLY IN
THE NORTH CAROLINA COLLECTION
